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BOOK REVIEWS

The Future in America. By H. G. WELLS. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1906. 8vo, pp. 259.

No living author is perhaps better qualified to write about America than Mr. Wells. His intelligence, his open-mindedness, his penetration, his training in economic and sociological methods, were made evident in his *Anticipations and Mankind in the Making*. In his latest volume he appears in a somewhat new rôle. He wishes to translate certain formulae into living realities. He comes to America to study its tendencies and on the basis of his observations to forecast the probable future. While on the Atlantic steamer on his way to New York he writes:

I want to cross the Atlantic . . . to question more or less openly certain Americans, not only certain men and women, but the mute expressive presences of house and appliance, of statue, flag and public building, and the large collective visages of crowds, what it is all up to, what it thinks it is all after, how far it means to escape or improve upon its purely material destinies. I want over there to find whatever consciousness or vague consciousness of a common purpose there may be; what is their vision, their American Utopia; how much there is shaping to attain it; how much capacity goes with the will—what, in short, there is in America, over and above the mere mechanical consequences of scattering multitudes of energetic Europeans athwart a vast, healthy, productive, and practically empty continent in the temperate zone.

This is rather a large order, and yet Mr. Wells has written a book that, if it does not satisfy the curiosity of Americans, at least will leave their minds clearer to the difficulties of the question. Mr. Wells admits the large and growing scale of national wealth in America. He stints no words in picturing the mere size of industry, buildings, ships, crowds, and cities. He compares his own experience and observation in some of these matters with those of Dickens in the earlier half of the nineteenth century. He wishes conclusively to demonstrate to the reader that he is fully alive to this material growth, that he does not underestimate its importance, its benefits or its possibilities; and yet—he is not satisfied. There is hardly a tinge of pessimism in his nature, and yet with the fullest

comprehension of all the progressive factors in America he doubts, and the doubt is seemingly a very inevitable one.

"I believe," he says "—passionately, as a doubting lover believes in his mistress—in the future of mankind." Mr. Wells admits not only the material progress of America, the general high standard of living, but much more. He perceives, and in part at least admires, the hopefulness, the self-reliance, the individual alertness, the shrewdness of Americans; and yet he sees something wanting—wanting in a profound social sense. He does not for one thing believe in a lot of self-complacent aphorisms or popular formulae as, "If each individual looks out for himself, society will take care of itself," or as, "It is only three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves"—and similar easy abstractions. He writes as follows:

Surely the greatness of life is still to come; it is not in such accidents as mountains or the sea. I have seen the splendors of the mountains, sunrise and sunset among them, and the waste immensity of sky and sea. I am not blind because I can see beyond these glories. To me no other thing is credible than that all the natural beauty in the world is only so much material for the imagination and the mind, so many hints and suggestions for art and creation. Whatever is, is but the lure and symbol toward what can be willed and done.

Elsewhere he says :

The material factors in a nation's future are subordinate factors. . . . The essential factor in the destiny of a nation, as of a man and of mankind, lies in the form of its will and in the quality and quantity of its will.

But the individual will for his personal concerns is not the determining agent.

I am told, and I am disposed to believe it, that the Americans are a people of great individual force of will, and the clear, strong faces of many young Americans . . . incline me to give a provisional credit to that; but how far does all this possible will-force aggregate to a great national purpose?—What algebraically does it add up to when this and that have canceled each other? That may be a different thing altogether.

And so beyond the glitter, the show, the luxury, the immense activity and enterprise of America he looks to find something else, and he is not sure but that it is wanting—a want of some national human purpose consciously working out. Each person, each group of persons, has certain interests at heart; but he notes a lack of civic discipline, a lack of organization of the state, a lack of achieved

national result. In chapter 5 he gives a brief survey of the historical origin of American political institutions. The subject-matter of this chapter is not new, yet for the busy, eager American has elements in it of a liberal education. Americans too readily assume that prevailing conditions in this country are wholly natural and in essence have always existed. This is a mistake resulting from sheer ignorance. No nation, the author holds, can expect to survive and progress that is interested altogether or mainly in merely industrial efficiency, that does not take into account its own past and its future. It must look, nationally, so to speak, both before and after. It must have a human end in view. Differences of individual opinion are inevitable and even necessary, but there must be also a common ground of achieved and augmenting result. The political philosophy of the eighteenth century to which he refers was valuable, even noble, in its day, but it was in a great measure a philosophy founded on a reaction against absolutism. It was negative. Now freedom is not attained merely by absence of government interference. It is a positive thing to be achieved by the solution of great human and economic problems. Are we Americans to be forever held in bondage by the negative philosophy of the eighteenth century? Or at least may we not interpret the eighteenth century ideals to meet the needs of the twentieth century? Mr. Wells evidently sees the signs of a coming change in our point of view.

My impression is clear that he [Roosevelt] and all the world of men he stands for have done forever with the threadbare formulae that have served America such an unconscionable time.

The corruption from which America is suffering in political and corporation circles is neither a wholly surprising fact to Mr. Wells nor a very depressing one. He admits that there is perhaps some ethical confusion in this country, but disbelieves the existence of any fundamental dishonesty. Nor does he attribute this corruption to the greed either of politicians or of the leaders of industry. He withholds any very direct explanation of these conditions, but between the lines it is not difficult to get his meaning: "All men are equal at the great game of business. You try for the best of each bargain, and so does your opponent. . . . You play fair and hard." Evidently Mr. Wells does not believe that this method exclusively pursued produces the best results.

This is the reality of American corruption, huge, exclusive pre-occu-

pation with dollar-getting. What is called corruption by the press is really no more than the acute expression in individual cases of this general fault.

He adds ironically:

I wish I could catch the soul of Herbert Spencer and tether it in Chicago for awhile to gather fresh evidence upon the superiority of unfettered individualistic enterprises to things managed by the state.

Mr. Wells takes little interest in the campaign of personalities which seems at the present moment to be an obsession in America.

In a game [he is speaking of business in America] which is bound to bring the losers to despair it is childish to charge the winners with murder. It is the game that is criminal.

From scattered sentences as well as from the general tenor of his book one may get the gist of his criticism of the sources of corruption. The economic and political disorders from which we seem at present to be suffering in America are attributable in his opinion to general causes for which all are nearly equally responsible. And they can be cured, not by an outburst of brutalities and insults, but by political and social action, by strengthening the powers and organization of the state, and by securing to each one the rewards of effort within the limits of public welfare. For the general outline of a programme to carry this reform into effect the reader will have to consult the book itself.

GARRETT DROPPERS

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The Taxation of the Gross Receipts of Railways in Wisconsin.

By GUY EDWARD SNIDER. ["Publications of the American Economic Association," November, 1906.] 8vo, pp. viii+138.

This paper presents numerous facts of interest to the student of taxation and is valuable as an investigation of original sources. The author attempts to justify the acceptance of gross receipts as the basis for taxation of railways from the experience of Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, and Iowa, with different methods of taxation. The main argument he advances in favor of the tax on gross receipts is its simplicity of administration in comparison with the ad-valorem tax. However, he considers that the tax on gross receipts is not without its defects, even from the point of view of administration. There is difficulty in determining the mileage upon